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Price 1d.
Series 2. Pamphlet No. 8.



The
League of Free Nations Association,
22, BUCKINGHAM GATE, S.W.1.

JX 1975
THE MORAL ASPECT .9
OF THE H6
LEAGUE OF NATIONS

By SILAS K. HOCKING.

THERE can be only one adequate end to the bitter struggle through which we are passing, and that is the utter destruction of the godless militarisms that have drenched the earth with blood; and the creation of a new order which shall make war in the future impossible. Unless that is accomplished—whatever we may achieve in other respects—we shall have failed in the essential thing, and the world will be left no better for its long agony and sacrifice, but in many respects a great deal worse. The future will be unendurable if, when peace comes, pre-war conditions still obtain; for in that event every nation will feel compelled to start afresh to re-arm, and to re-arm on a scale scarcely dreamed of as yet. Science will have to devote itself—and with feverish energy—to devising new and more formidable instruments of destruction; the burden of taxation—almost unbearable now—will go on increasing, and life will be a hideous and intolerable nightmare of fear and apprehension.

It is not surprising, therefore, that thoughtful men everywhere are searching eagerly for some way out of the difficulty—some means of delivering mankind from such a direful prospect—some method by which a new order shall be established—an order of justice and right law, which shall take the place of the present order of brute force.

The Growth of an Idea

Little by little the idea of a League of Free Nations has grown and taken shape. It has its roots in the

Sermon on the Mount; it has been fostered—though with insufficient care—by the Christian Church; it has been watered by Peace and Arbitration Societies; it has been trimmed and pruned by Conferences and Councils; it was quickened by the establishment of the Hague Tribunal; and finally, in June, 1915, it emerged from a Conference in the Independence Hall, Philadelphia, in the form of "A League of Nations to Enforce Peace."

In days to come the proposal may be further modified and improved, but for the present, at any rate, it provides a good working model. It has in itself the promise and prophecy of a better future. It holds out to distraught humanity a new hope; and it only needs to be pushed forward with energy and enthusiasm for that hope to be crystallised into a great and beneficent reality.

A Workable Scheme

That there are many difficulties that will have to be surmounted goes without saying; that it will meet with fierce opposition may be taken for granted. Already the critics are on the war-path, "breathing out slaughter," but that should give no ground for discouragement. Every great movement for the betterment of the world has encountered difficulties and met with opposition. The enduring things are beaten into shape by conflict. But to say that the thing is unworkable and impossible is to belittle humanity and insult its intelligence. If it is possible to devise and perfect machinery for the prosecution of war, it is childish to say that machinery cannot be devised for the maintenance of peace.

For myself, I believe in the scheme because I have never lost faith in the moral order of the Universe. In spite of lapses into barbarism, the world moves forward to its appointed end. Indeed, I question whether the ethical standard of the world as a whole was ever so high as at present; and it is that which makes the conduct of Germany appear so hideous and repulsive. In a darker and less moral age the abominations of the Kaiser and his satellites would not have appeared so shocking; to-day they are an affront to every moral sense.

The Kaiser's Foul Blow

The Kaiser, with infinite stupidity, took advantage of the moment when morally the world was at its best to strike his foul blow, and from that moment he has dragged

the German nation down from infamy to deeper infamies still, until to-day the whole civilised world stands aghast at the spectacle of his crimes. In that, and in that alone, lies the explanation of Germany's failure—not in the ineffectiveness of her war machine, not in the mistakes of her Generals, not in the poor quality of her troops; but in her defiance of the moral order, in her contempt for treaties, in her violation of the laws of God and man. That brought England in, and Italy, and the United States. The world is built on moral foundations, and any nation that sets itself to dig up those foundations and to destroy the moral order of the Universe is bound ultimately to fail.

In the meanwhile, it is the business of all free nations that believe in righteousness to seek to prevent any such violation of the moral order in the future, and to bring home to the offending State the enormity of her crimes. The German people must have watched with curious interest the gradual banding together of the great nations of the world against them; they must have asked, with considerable searchings of heart, why Germany had become an Ishmael among the tribes of Israel—what lay at the back of this almost universal execration?

The Awakening

They have been told, as we know, by their war-lords and their kept Press, that jealousy was at the root of it all—jealousy of their commercial success, their scientific attainments, their intellectual culture, their growing influence. But there has been evidence of late that the truth has begun to percolate slowly through their minds. With all their moral obtuseness, they are not fools. A few of them, at any rate, are beginning to see that crime does not pay; that to tear up treaties and affront the moral sense of the world is a mistake—that behind this uprising of seven-eighths of the world against them, there is a moral indignation that cannot be ignored, and that will have to be reckoned with.

Also, they are watching with interest the growth and development of this idea of a League of Free Nations. What does it mean? What is its objective? Not war, but peace. Not oppression, but freedom. Not aggrandisement for any, but equal rights for all—the weak, as well as the strong. In a word, it is becoming clear to some of them, as it is clear to us, that this movement is not so much

political as ethical; that it has its roots in the moral order of the Universe; that it is an evangel of righteousness; that its supreme purpose is to rid the world for ever of the appalling crime of war.

The World's Longing

It will no doubt take time to convince the average German that war is a crime. He has been taught from childhood the very opposite. He has been told by teacher and text-book that war is a nation's best industry—an industry that brings riches and greatness to the State and profit and prosperity to the individual; and, being a servile creature, he accepts in all good faith what his teachers and pastors tell him. But this war has been a great eye-opener for most people. It has swept away a whole host of illusions and superstitions. It has made fools wise. He would be a bold man—and not a particularly wise one—who would chant the praises of war to-day. We know too much. Its meaning has been brought home to us too vividly. We have seen its hideousness and brutality, its loathsomeness and horror. What the world (Germany included) longs for to-day, with an almost intolerable longing, is deliverance from its curse and shame.

The Bow of Promise

Hence the League of Free Nations is in harmony with the world's most passionate desire. It chimes in with its highest moral ideal, and with the most cherished tenet of its faith. It re-awakens the angels' song of Peace and Goodwill. It puts once more a bow in the clouds. It is, in my judgment, the greatest moral movement of the century.

For the moment it may be a great divider—a divider of the good from the bad, the free from the bound, the democrat from the autocrat—but it will become a great unifier later on, linking up into one great family all the nations of the earth, and so making possible the prophet's dream of a new world wherein dwells righteousness.

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